

FOR THE 2014 NOVA LANGUAGE ACCESS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

CULTURAL SELF-STUDY:
A FOUNDATION FOR CULTURAL LITERACY AND COMPETENCE.

“We understand the nature of culture when we experience how we are the vehicles for the expression of culture.”

Presenter: Robert C. Weigl, Ph.D.
Director, The Franklin Center
Alexandria, Virginia
Tel 703 548-1408

weiglrg@aol.com

A Basic Premise of this Program

A basic premise of this program: well disciplined carefully described cultural self-study—viewed as field *research* and personal discovery-- has a role to play in most intercultural training efforts and should be a standard facet of the professional development of language teachers, interpreters, translators, and people in international and domestic diversity work. This “research” about yourself should be well organized, disciplined, *and* experiential. It provides you with a deeply felt conceptual framework for understanding others’ cultures as well as your own.

This program provides a model of self-study and materials you can use to develop self-study among colleagues, students, teachers, human service workers, other public servants and clients. I hope we might develop a linked community of users to assist each other and to share what we learn from cultural self-study.

The materials presented here have been published in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. (Contact me for a paper copy.) In greater detail, I have recorded these materials for the American Psychological Association as a continuing education program for psychologists, and they are available to anyone through the APA Office of Continuing Education.

Language and Culture: How Tightly Connected?

I would be interested in your own answers question.

The story of an American boy in Japan.

Do “fluent fools” still exist?

The position of the Interagency Language Roundtable here in Washington.

There are now five levels of intercultural sophistication to accompany five tiered ratings of language proficiency. Based on the work of Milton Bennett, a widely recognized intercultural educator and trainer.

There are many routes to intercultural development. Cultural self-study is an important foundational element in this process. Consider it for yourself, colleagues. It goes far beyond clarifying ethnic identity to bring you in touch with the elements of and emotional investment in the culture(s) you enact every day . It provides an often startling personal growth experience as well as a more conceptual education about culture. Also, once you get into it, it is fun.

The Development of the Cultural Self-Study Model

- Discovered on UVA's Semester at Sea. Strong field work, commitment among self-studiers.
- Refined over 15 years of teaching undergrads. Inspiring a passion for cultural studies.
- Presented five times at national meetings (SCCR, IAIR, the Forum .)
- Detailed presentation in journal article, 2009 in the International Journal of Intercultural Relations. (Copies available at your request.)
- Conceptual framework of model adopted for text by Cambridge University Press.
- Adoption and current sale on-line by American Psychological Association.

How does self-study work, why effective

- Two primary dynamisms, one cognitive the other emotional.

Increased conceptual sophistication. "Bidirectional learning." Concepts used for self-construction are used with fluency in understanding others.

Increased cultural empathy. When we feel the authority, the automaticities of culture operating in our own lives, we appreciate its force in others' lives.

It takes us way beyond respecting culture as an expression of good will or adherence to a policy about cultural equality to a point that we become *culturally literate*.

What does a completed self-study look like?

Ideally a carefully crafted and edited document 8-10 pages, following a sequence of eight categories. Written as either a lab report or more literary self-description. Places a premium on writing skills, but fully doable for the average college student. For use in public agencies we can explore other shortened formats. (Possibly exploring 4-5 categories, reducing reporting to 4-5 pages.) It is CRITICAL to write up your self-study.

Keep in mind:

Every person is like all other people, like some other people, and like no other person.
(From Anthropologist Floyd Kluckhohn.)

Due to individualism and assimilationism many Americans have trouble with this statement. Cultural self-study explores how each of us is like “some other people” ---how we are representative of ethnic, cultural, and racial groups.

Key categories underlying formation of self-study structure.

Built from teaching cross-cultural psychology:

- HISTORY
- PLACES
- SCRIPTS
- PERSONS
- GROUPS
- VALUES
- MEANINGS

Some basic instructions.

It is important to keep in mind that cultural self-study is not a quick process. With an introductory session, work on your own, at least one meeting to discuss progress and address questions, and write-up time you have to invest at least 30 hours to complete your study.

1. Agencies may want to have an outside consultant prepare an in-house self-study leader. (Or have one person complete the APA on line training.)
2. Read about your ethnic groups of origin in M. McGoldrick et. al. book *Ethnicity and Family Therapy* to get you started.
3. Develop an eight section notebook (or set of computer files) to record self-observations.
4. Start with a one day workshop to cover the content of the eight steps.
5. Have people work on their own self-study privately, but reconvene with each other and leader to discuss progress, problems, and discoveries.
6. Record your observations and findings over several sittings. A self-study emerges in layers.
7. Expect it will feel uncomfortable at first—excited, even exhilarated as you proceed.
8. Usually you will have far more material than you can include in a report. Much editing will be required.
9. Receive feedback and applause from in-house or external facilitator, or a study partner.
10. THE FINAL STEP: NOW YOU ARE READY TO DISCUSS THE CULTURE OF PEOPLE WITH WHOM YOU WORK IN THE SAME TERMS YOU HAVE USED TO STUDY YOURSELF.

Detailed Outline/Instructions for Self-Study

Please keep in mind that, although some of these instructions will be clear right away, everyone really needs the initial one day workshop to understand fully what is described below. Also read my published article *Intercultural competence through cultural self-study: A strategy for adult learners*, which is available to you on request.

1. Historical Roots and Important memberships

We embody and repeat the social learning and quirks of those who came before us.

- Define “my people” and their origins.
- Identify historical events or eras impacting the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of your family.

- Consider immigrant origins, migration histories, and family sagas.
- Describe valued family traditions, likes and dislikes, views of different ethnic and social groups.
- Note Institutions—school, church, the military, labor union etc., critical in shaping you.

2. Settings and Scripts Important in your growing up

Settings are the places we occupy in everyday life. Scripts are shared patterns of behavior that happen repeatedly in these places. (Example: a classroom, church, empty lot, etc.)

- Vividly describe three or four settings and their scripts important in shaping you.
- Consider situations such as a family meal, a classroom, peer group, holiday, team, etc.
- Indicate for each setting-script combination its meaning for and impact on you.
- Describe your roots in places important in your past and present.
- What skills, feelings, and needs were most likely to develop in customary settings.

3. Group Experiences

Culture is a group or collective product. Much of how we behave in groups was learned at home.

- Describe how your family of origin operated (operates) as a group.
- Consider gender roles, division of labor, authority & expected compliance level, conflict management, problem solving, expectation for dependence vs. independence, expected levels of loyalty and self-sacrifice, concepts of individual and group boundaries.
- How did your family prepare you for participation in extra-familial groups? Were you taught to trust or to mistrust groups?
- To what extent have you been inclined to perceive in-groups and out-groups? Who was identified as being “in” and “out”?

4. Personal markers of age, class, gender, and ethnicity.

Think of yourself in still photographs. What markers can others see to categorize you?

- Consider your “sign equipment”—features of appearance, dress, and physical condition which help others define you.

- How do these personal markers assist others in categorizing you on the basis of age, class, gender, and ethnicity?
- How have you learned to accent or cloak these markers?
- Is this display or cloaking of personal markers culturally determined?

5. Scripting of Your Personhood-Your Cultural Choreography

How do you move and synchronize your action with what others do. In active terms, what is your style and how is this shared with others.

- Describe broadly your characteristic movement style in terms of free, bound, and neutral flow.
- Describe the skills, emotions, and motives most evident in your behavior and speech.
- Describe some features of your characteristic “non-verbals” in terms such as emotional display, gestures, use of space interpersonally, use of touch, eye contact, speed and rhythm of movement, etc.
- Describe your conversational style in terms of use of language, accent, jargon or slang, volume level, assertiveness, style of floor sharing.
- In reviewing the items above estimate the degree to which you express a particular culture.

6. Cognitive Style/Meanings

Consider at least two or any combination of the following:

- What’s your style of thinking: field dependent or independent; “we or me” centered, emotional vs. rational; poetic vs. scientific; wide-angle or close-up, etc.?
- How does the language or languages you speak impact your understanding?
- How do you describe the cause of events: intentional or fate determined, personally or environmentally determined, predictable or random, threatening or benign, subject to change or fixed, influenced more by divine or human forces?
- Can you find a way to describe your characteristic, everyday way of mapping the world? What do you emphasize or miss, include or exclude? How precise or “soft focus” is your take on things?
- In what ways are your cognitive patterns shaped by or expressive of cultural factors?

7. Beliefs, Values, and World Views

- Do you come from traditions with “tight” and strict, or “loose” and permissive values?
- What beliefs were explicitly stated and clearly evident during your upbringing?
- What broader, often less articulate sets of values or world views shaped and continue to shape you today. Consider the value dimensions or syndromes such as individualism vs. collectivism, reliance on democratic or hierarchical ways of life. Map your current functioning in terms of these values.
- Either formally or informally, how has religion shaped you? Consider how you might have accepted and/or rejected the influence of religion in your life.

8. Overview of Your Cultural Programming and Identity

- Provide a brief summary of your cultural programming.
- What is your cultural or ethnic identity? (That is, how do you now answer the question “Who am I?” regarding your ethnicity.) How has it been influenced by this self-study exercise?
- In what ways is your personality one that is preferred, rewarded, or “naturally selected” by the culture and society in which you live? **(This is an excellent approach for summary understanding of how you embody culture.)**
- How cultural are you? To what extent is culture a significant factor in the overall way you operate as a person